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A Study of Optimism Among Latinos in a Successful Urban School

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Abstract

This quantitative study investigated the levels of optimism and self-concepts of 76, fourth-sixth graders who attend an academically successful, English-immersion, private school serving a majority Latino and urban population. Two instruments measured the students' self-perceptions with expected and unexpected results. Although academically successful and functioning as the majority, these Latinos were not particularly optimistic. Gender, language proficiency, and grade level were all factors related to the significant findings. The related discussion challenges educators to explore the various aspects contributing to positive self-concepts and to better understand how to develop and sustain optimism among students often considered academically at-risk.

Drawn by the affluence and democratic ideals of the United States and Canada, immigrants come seeking opportunities for themselves and their children. They hope that touted democratic processes will, in fact, tangibly afford many chances to develop their potential, maintain their cultural values, and allow them to successfully participate within a diversified populace (Bruner, 1997). Their conceptions of democracy generally include availability of an education that will give them access to a better life. They come with hope about their futures, but often face numerous challenges that can erode their optimism and diminish their efforts to make their dreams come true (Chaudron, 1988; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992). In fact, as representatives of marginalized populations realize that there are strong structural barriers that can prevent them from taking advantage of economic opportunities, hope can fade and there is often an increase in depressive symptoms (Katragadda & Tidwell, 1998.)

Seligman (1998) has studied optimism and pessimism and describes the difference in these perspectives as how people perceive negative events. Pessimists view unfortunate happenings as pervasive, permanent, and they take failures very personally. If this perspective continues, pessimists can learn to be helpless, feeling that their actions have no effect. Optimists perceive misfortune as temporary, relating it to themselves in a minimal way, and not necessarily as their fault. With such a perspective, optimists do not readily give up hope that things will change and that good consequences are likely. Optimism has also been defined as "the anticipation of best possible outcomes based on actions and events that facilitate such positive desired results" (Rossatto, 2005, p. 11). Work and school contexts entail the potential to enhance and hinder learner success. To ward off helplessness, it is important to help learners offset a sense of

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fatalism—“the belief that we as humans are unable to influence the events and circumstances of our lives” (Rossatto, 2005, p. 12). Thus, although schools are responsible for developing academic skills, an integral factor in school success is the motivation to work on established goals for a more productive future.

Despite the growing numbers of Latino immigrants in the United States, many U.S. educators consider their Latino students at risk for failure because of their differences (Berg, 2003; Reese, 2002). Their language, cultural, and socioeconomic disparities are often considered as deficiencies and educators struggle with how to respect differences and provide equal access to educational systems that assume and value a mostly white, middle-class perspective (Cummins, 1986). Effective schools and teacher research have recognized that programs and teachers are integral in bridging or connecting students to the educational system and equipping them with the skills and strategies necessary for academic achievement within and beyond compulsory school classrooms (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Díaz & Flores, 2001; Reyes & Halcón, 2001).

According to Seligman (1998), school success is typically considered to be a result of talent and desire (Seligman, 1998); but, minority students can begin to feel as if they do not belong or that academic achievement is too painful a process to endure. Educators often fail to communicate the hidden rules for success that would give students opportunity and access (Delpit, 1995). Thus, although they might be willing, some students do not learn how to effectively access the system and find their place within it. One interesting aspect of school success is a student's openness or receptiveness to the school environment (Fisher, 1974.) Being different should not mean being unable to function in educational systems that afford learning opportunities. Being different does, however, challenge students' sense of self in both social and academic ways.

A key aspect of successful schools is efficacy—the belief that one's efforts can make a difference. Teacher efficacy, both individual and collective (Goddard & Goddard, 2001), is correlated to student achievement (Alderman, 2002). Student efficacy (Baker & Wigfield, 1999; Schunk, 1991) fosters agentive actions, engagement (e.g., attendance and productive on-task behaviors) and persistence. Unfortunately, the drop-out rate among Latinos in the United States is high, often between 40 and 50% (Fitzgerald, 1995; Rivera-Batiz, 1996). There are numerous reasons why students leave school, but one factor is that they often feel marginalized within the system while job prospects offer an immediate opportunity to help their families and to obtain funds needed to attain at least an attenuated version of the American dream.

Successful schools for linguistically diverse students do exist, however, and understanding the characteristics of successful schools and successful students may help us better understand the skills and dispositions that can be promoted among students often considered at risk for leaving school early (Abi-Nader, 1990). In effective programs for linguistically diverse students, engagement is high and students feel empowered to achieve (Feuerstein, Klein, & Tannenbaum, 1991; Williams & Burden, 1997). In fact, in successful schools, minority student success is similar to that of mainstream populations. The students are generally confident, hopeful, and persistent. They see difficulties as escapable and classroom discourse is positive and influences their thinking constructively (Seligman, 1998). Effective teachers see students as capable learners; they challenge students to challenge themselves, to problem solve at high levels, to use strengths to excel, to be future-oriented, to achieve despite setbacks. High-achieving schools are characterized by classrooms that reflect cooperative work and a problem-solving approach to

learning. As Moll (1988) noted, “students are as smart as allowed by the curriculum” (p. 467), and effective programs promote positive perceptions among students.

Unfortunately, programs exemplifying those characteristics are too few. Analyses of successful programs for Latino learners are limited and, in the United States, generally describe only bilingual programs. However, in reality, the majority of Spanish-dominant students in American schools receive their instruction in monolingual English programs (Schirmer, Casbon, & Twiss, 1996). As a matter of fact, some states now mandate that minority language students be educated in English-only programs. Scrutiny of existing and extremely successful English-immersion programs serving predominantly Latino students could thus provide a model for other programs, as well as identify best educational practices for implementation elsewhere. There is a need to determine ways to export school success, if appropriate, beyond local borders and the traditional approaches that have been used in the past.

The school that served as the context for this study seeks to promote success among its minority populations and works to provide a model for others concerned about equality and excellence in education. The school administration asked a university research team to help profile the school program and to investigate the salient aspects or combination of components that contribute to its success, offering a channel to communicate these components for implementation elsewhere. The research team collaborated with the school for two years and combined preliminary qualitative data with quantitative assessment and attendance data to describe and analyze the school’s effectiveness. The research inquiry guiding this portion of the investigation is whether the students attending a high-achieving, urban, private school in a Latino community are optimistic about their futures and have positive self-concepts.

The Context

The study site is a successful, private, English-immersion, elementary school serving an urban Latino community. Approximately 250 students, ranging from three to twelve years, attend the school. The school includes a program for three-year-olds, preschoolers and kindergartners through sixth grade. Seventy-four percent of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch during the previous academic year. The average family income for the same time period was \$29,191. The average tuition per month per family for the 168 families served by the school was \$79.14. Local business persons and major fund raisers contribute most of the financial resources needed to operate the school on an annual basis. Indeed, this is a well-resourced school located in a poorer section of a major metropolitan city. The school is designed to serve the children in the surrounding, largely Latino, neighborhood and to function as an example of effective urban education. There are two classes per grade level with an average of 16 students assigned to each teacher. The teachers are predominantly Anglo and female, but the students are 97% Latino. (The school does employ some bilingual staff members who help to communicate with parents in Spanish.) In addition, parental involvement is expected. For example, parents volunteer to serve breakfast and lunch, accompany field trips, and attend several parent-teacher conferences each year.

The school closely monitors its academic success and reported that 89% of the students (grades three through six) passed the reading portion of the state-mandated test in the first year of the

study. Ninety-six percent of the third through sixth graders passed the state's math test that same year. All of the fourth graders passed the state-mandated writing test at the end of the school year. The average daily attendance was 98%.

Methodology

Analyses of the earlier investigations indicated that the school is very effective in helping at-risk, urban Latino students meet and exceed the state's academic requirements. To reiterate, nearly 70% of the students speak Spanish at home, yet 100% of the fifth and sixth graders passed the state's required reading test in previous year. Ninety-six percent of the students passed both reading and math (Minett, 2004). The research team observed a sensitive, respectful environment that is forward-moving (rather than routine or static) and promotes a futuristic perspective among its students (Dweck & Licht, 1980). Of particular interest to the researchers is the way the faculty stack key components (Slavin & Calderon, 2001) for a unique combination of practices that seem to synergistically contribute to student success. Thus, the school appears to provide a current example of institutional success and represents an integration of key components that can be replicated elsewhere. Furthermore, the parents are very pleased with the school's instructional program and its ability to keep students safe and engaged in the curriculum.

This phase of investigation entails an analysis of students' affect about their school, featuring: completion of two different self-concept scales by students in grades 4-6. The research questions guiding this phase of the investigation were:

1. How do Latino students (at this successful urban school) view themselves as learners?
2. Do the Latino students (at this successful urban school) evidence optimism about their futures?

The researchers used two instruments to measure students' affect and self-concepts: the *Piers-Harris 2: Children's Self-Concept Scale* (Piers & Herzberg, 2003) and the *Children's Attributional Style Questionnaire* (Seligman, 1998.) The *Piers-Harris 2 Children's Self-Concept Scale* (P-H 2) is a quantitative, self-report index of self-concept, appropriate for children from 8-18 years of age. The second edition uses 60 yes/no items to measure global self-concept and six separate domains: Behavioral Adjustment, Intellectual and School Status, Physical Appearance and Attributes, Freedom from Anxiety, Popularity, and Happiness and Satisfaction. A sample item is, "I feel left out of things" which respondents answer either affirmatively ("yes") or negatively ("no"). All factors are scored so that the higher the score, the more positive the attribute. Both the first and second editions of the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale have been used with Latino and other minority populations (Martinez, Hays, & Solway, 1979; Reyes & Jason, 1993; Richman, Clark, & Brown, 1985; Subervi-Vélez & Necochea, 1990).

The *Children's Attributional Style Questionnaire* (CASQ) includes 48 situation-based prompts with two response options. For example, one item reads "You tell a joke and no one laughs." Which are you more likely to think—"I don't tell jokes well" or "The joke is so well known that it is no longer funny." The researchers had versions of the questionnaires in both English and Spanish.

One of the researchers administered the self-concept instruments to all the fourth, fifth, and sixth graders one morning in early December in the school cafeteria. After a brief explanation of the tasks and offering to provide Spanish translations, the researcher read each item and response option to the students who then marked their responses. Classroom teachers helped to proctor the assessment administration to make sure that the students were working through the items with the researcher. Spanish translations of the documents had been prepared beforehand if students needed an item read in Spanish. (Most of the administration of the self-concept scales was conducted in English because students did not ask for Spanish translation.) The administration of the two instruments took approximately 40 minutes.

As is displayed in Table 1, a total of 76 students who had parental consent to participate in the study completed the self-concept instruments. Thus, while only a modest sample size, it does represent 84% of the nine through twelve-year-old students at the school. Of those students, 54% were females and 46% were males.

Table 1. *Number of Students by Gender and Grade Level*

Grade Level	Boys	Girls	Total
4 th	9	12	21
5 th	14	16	30
6 th	12	13	25
Total	35	41	76

The following section shares the results of the analyses of the data regarding students' self-concepts. Data analyses of the self-concept instruments included: t-test comparisons, ANOVAs, MANOVAs, and correlations.

Results

The salient findings of the self-concept scales yielded interesting and some unexpected results. As a group, the student population appears only moderately optimistic (as indicated by scores on the CASQ in Table 2). Of the 76 students, 30% indicated high levels of optimism, 34% appeared moderately optimistic, and 36% had low optimism. Of the three grade levels, the incidence of low optimism was twice as frequent among sixth graders. In general, the means of these students' Optimism scores were correlated to the Happiness and Satisfaction domain score on the P-H 2. The Pearson Correlation coefficient for Happiness and Satisfaction and Optimism was .429, significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Moreover, Happiness and Satisfaction scores predicted 18.4% of the scores for Optimism, which means that being happy contributed to the overall optimism of these students. In other words, as would be expected, being happy correlated with being hopeful.

One specific finding from the CASQ analysis was that the boys in this study had a statistically significantly lower mean score than the reported standardization sample regarding their view of negative circumstances as being permanent (2.34 vs. 2.80, $t=.036$, $p < .05$). In fact, 13.5% of the

students in the study appeared to be at risk for depression, meaning some students' scores were extremely pessimistic, with boys (17.2%) more vulnerable than girls (9.8%). People who are extremely negative about their circumstances tend to evidence symptoms of depression. In this study, the higher-grade students evidenced more depressive indicators than did the lower-grade students.

Table 2. *Means Optimism Scores on the CASQ by Gender*

Optimism Scores on the CASQ	N	Study means	Standardization sample means
Boys	35	4.80	5.0
Girls	41	6.29	7.0
Total	76	5.61	6.0

As can be seen in Table 3, the *t*-score mean for global self-concept of this group on the P-H 2 was 49.12. This score is in the average range (scores above 60 are considered high and scores below 45 are considered low). Furthermore, the mean subtotal scores for the six domains ranged from 47.96 (Physical Attributes) to 51.46 (Freedom from Anxiety).

Table 3. *P-H 2 Average T-Scores for Study Subjects and Standardization Sample*

Self-Concept Scale	Average <i>t</i> -scores for the 9-12 year-olds in this study	Average <i>t</i> -scores for 9-12 year-olds in standardization sample	<i>T</i> -test result
Total	49.12	51.40	.010**
Behavioral Adjustment	49.80	51.15	.229
Intellectual and School Status	48.96	51.0	.036*
Physical Appearance and Attributes	47.96	50.20	.042*
Freedom From Anxiety	51.46	50.65	.392
Popularity	49.95	50.75	.467
Happiness and Satisfaction	50.12	51.35	.209

*Significant at the $p = .05$ level.

** Significant at the $p = .01$ level.

Domain scores above 56 are considered above average, while scores less than 40 are considered below average. The domains with the highest mean *T*-scores among these students were Freedom from Anxiety ($M=51.46$), Happiness and Satisfaction ($M=50.12$), and Popularity ($M= 49.95$).

The mean domain score for Freedom from Anxiety was the only mean to exceed that of the published averages. The lowest mean *t*-score for this group was 47.96 for Physical Appearance and Attributes, but again, all of the mean *t*-scores were in the average range.

Although within the average range, the means for the P-H 2 in this study were lower than the mean scores published by Piers & Herzberg (2003), who report the mean scores for a heterogeneous population and include a subset of Hispanic participants that was similar to the target population. Therefore, some comparison between groups was made possible.

Regarding their global self-concepts, however, these students differed significantly from the Latino published standardization sample (with an effect size of .35) and populations with lower, head-of-household educations ($p = .016$) (Piers & Herzberg, 2003). In other words, when compared to other Latinos or students from similarly, less-educated households, the students scored higher than the published means on the P-H 2: Children's (see Table 4.)

Table 4. *P-H 2 Global Self-Concept Average T-Scores for Study and Standardization Sample by Gender*

	Average <i>t</i> -scores for 9-12 year-olds in this study	Standardization sample average <i>t</i> -scores for 9-12 year-olds	Standardization sample average <i>t</i> -scores for Latinos	Standardization sample average <i>t</i> -scores for similar head of household's education level
Boys	45.14	49.6	Not reported by gender	Not reported by gender
Girls	44.20	50.4	Not reported by gender	Not reported by gender
Total	44.63	50.1	47.4	48.4

On several subscales of the P-H 2, the students also appeared significantly different from the norm and from similar populations. In particular, as a group, they scored significantly higher on the Freedom from Anxiety ($p=.001$), Happiness and Satisfaction ($p=.005$) and Behavioral Adjustment ($p=.005$). The means for these students on these three subscales were all in the high-average range. Thus, these students, as a group, seemed less troubled by anxiety and manifested a generally positive mood. Although not particularly optimistic, they seemed comfortable with themselves and their peers, carefree, satisfied with their lives, and perceived themselves to be generally well behaved, while admitting to realistic difficulties in their conduct.

Among this specific population, there were gender differences on global and some univariate variables: Overall, boys in this study exhibited higher global self-concepts ($p=.049$) and scored higher in Physical Appearance ($p=.037$), Freedom from Anxiety ($p=.003$), and Popularity ($p=.008$) than the girls. However, the girls scored significantly higher on Behavioral Adjustment

($p=.045$) and in viewing successes as being personal ($p=.055$), which is a domain score of the CASQ.

When comparing gender, the girls were significantly lower than boys on the Freedom from Anxiety domain (54.69 vs. 48.71). The relationship of these scores is moderately strong ($d = .357$), above the medium effect and nearing the range for a large effect size based on Cohen (1988). Over 90% of the variance in Freedom from Anxiety was predicted by gender, with boys expressing less anxiety than girls. Additionally, girls' scores were significantly lower than boys' on popularity with the gender effect at the medium level per Cohen (.285). When gender and grade level were considered, students' grade levels and genders predict their domain scores for Behavioral Adjustment, Physical Appearance and Attributes, and Popularity. Specifically, the boys were more positive about their looks and popularity, and were less anxious, while the girls had higher scores on the Behavioral Adjustment domain. The other factors, specifically number of years in the school and the students' home language, were not powerful predictors of the domain scores.

Regarding grade differences, about 40% of the variance in Behavioral Adjustment was explained by grade placement. The higher the grade the lower the Behavioral Adjustment score; thus, the fourth and fifth graders were more likely to acknowledge problematic behaviors than did the sixth graders.

The lowest subscale means on the P-H 2 occurred in Physical Appearance and Attributes and, notably, Intellectual and School Status. Although not significantly below the norm, these subscales reflect students' general satisfaction with their physical appearance, leadership skills, academic progress, and future expectations about school achievement. There was, however, a notable drop in Intellectual and School Status from fifth to sixth grade. Perhaps the prospect of going on to middle school at other locations was influencing the sixth graders in this study. Or, this particular group of sixth graders saw themselves as less academic based on teacher communication or previous academic performance. Given the school's academic success and its emphasis on staying in school, the average scores and the lower scores on the Intellectual and School Status subscale are indeed interesting.

Another salient finding is that the less proficient English speakers produced lower scores on the Popularity subscale ($p=.01$) than did the English proficient students. More specifically, the fluent English-speaking girls scored significantly higher than the less English-proficient girls in their optimism scores ($p=.028$.) English-language proficiency may be a factor in the self-concepts of these students, especially among female 4-6th graders. In this English-immersion program, students' associations between English language proficiency and school success may explain why the more proficient, English-speaking females reported higher perceptions of their popularity. These findings substantiate those of Katragadda and Tidwell's (1998), indicating that the expectations to speak English and related language problems do influence the social status, self-concepts, and anxiety levels of Latino students.

Interestingly, there was a downward trend in overall optimism from fourth through sixth grades. New(er) and younger students were the most optimistic. However, the scores for Physical Appearance and Attributes and for Freedom from Anxiety appeared to increase among students at the higher grade levels. These results were not expected because adolescents often become

more self-conscious about their physical features and many become stressed as they approach the prospects of going to middle school. It is counter-intuitive that students can be less anxious and also less optimistic, but the data obtained in this study indicate such a pattern.

Ten students (7.6%) were identified as depressed, given their responses on the CASQ. Again, most of these were in the sixth grade and the majority was male. These data seem to contradict earlier findings that indicate that 12%-15% of Latino adolescents evidenced emotional and behavioral symptoms warranting intervention services and that more Latino females than males were severely depressed (see Katragadda & Tidwell, 1998 for a summary.) Thus, it appears that the rate of depression among the students in this study is lower than other Latino adolescent populations. The students who scored as depressed on the CASQ were referred to the campus principal for monitoring. Fortunately, the school provides individual and family counseling to the students and their families, as needed.

Discussion

Although the students in this study evidenced average self-concepts and only moderate levels of optimism, the results were mixed. Admittedly, student optimism may be difficult to develop, sustain, or change, even in highly successful schools. Latino student populations and other minority groups may be more susceptible to pessimism and negative self-perceptions related to school behaviors in American schools. In a study of self-concept and acculturation of Latinos compared to Anglos, Franco (1983) found no decrease in self-esteem as students progressed through school. However, other research has linked lower self-esteem to lower levels of educational aspiration and an increased high school dropout rate (Rumberger, 1987). Although students of various backgrounds may become less positive about school as they get older, it is important to understand the role that optimism plays in student achievement. Optimism contributes to perseverance, which in turns contributes to achievement. Educators who understand these relationships can attend to their influence on students' school success.

This school used a cross-curricular, cross-grade-level approach to promoting citizenship and character development. Teaching strategies for enhancing self-esteem were a part of their curriculum and social-interaction (Reyes & Jason, 1993). It seems important to help students to develop an affinity for their school and to see it "as a place that offers hope and promise for the future" (p. 68). It is likely equally important to attend to community building, goal-setting, and envisioning possible futures for low-SES students, although it is unclear how long it takes such a curriculum to foster positive student perceptions.

In studies investigating Latinos vulnerability for dropping out of school and turning to gang activity, one key factor in shunning gang membership was "exhibiting a higher degree of conformity to the school's regulations. . . [and receiving] qualitatively different social and emotional familial support from their parents to help them deal with school rules and conflicts" (Delgado-Gaitan, 1988, p. 59). Interestingly, in this study, the students' Behavioral Adjustment scores decreased as students got older. This could be a cause for concern among urban youth with access to gang activity. Students' sense of belonging and a stimulating, personally relevant curriculum are likely key factors in successful schools and may correlate with lower gang-related

activity. Teacher education programs can help teachers understand how to build community among their students and how to connect students to the curriculum in meaningful ways.

In this study's population, the students who were less proficient scored significantly lower in their perceptions of popularity and levels of optimism. The level of English language proficiency appears to be a factor in students' self-concepts, especially in this monolingual, English-immersion program. Subscale scores (e.g., Behavioral Adjustment, Happiness and Satisfaction, etc.) on the self-concept instruments indicate the need for more attention to linguistic diversity and cultural aspects of growing up happy and hopeful, especially in monolingual settings. Being comfortable and sociable in the present may not correlate well with being optimistic and confident about the future. Thus, teachers and teacher educators should understand that developing English competence can augment the social identities of minority students.

Girls in this study suffered more anxiety and felt less popular or comfortable with their looks. In Hishiki's, (1969) study, the self-concepts of Latino girls were significantly lower than those of Anglo females, especially at the sixth-grade level. In another study of academic achievement positively correlating with self-concept, Treviño (1970) showed that English-dominant and Spanish-dominant children taught in a bilingual program had higher self-concepts scores than those taught in a mono-lingual English program. This comparison was contradicted by Fisher's (1974) study indicating that while the self-concepts of girls' increased, the self-concepts of boys decreased as they continued to attend a bilingual classroom. Adolescent girls typically score lower on self-concept measures than do boys and the general self-esteem is lower among low-SES students than among more affluent adolescents (Richman, et al., 1985.) Thus, the complex nature of achievement and self-concept, between genders, and especially among marginalized populations, deserves further scrutiny (Umaña-Taylor, Diversi, & Fine, 2002).

More gender studies are needed that address optimism and related constructs, especially as they pertain to cultural elements in marginalized populations. For example, how do levels of optimism relate to gang-related activities? How can schools create avenues for optimizing successful experiences? Do Latino girls in successful and less-successful schools generally score higher on subscales related to their behavior, but lower on their perceptions of intelligence and leadership? The ability to disaggregate performance data by gender can help school personnel to attend to these differences.

The lower Intellectual and School Status scores in this study also evidence a need to understand better this aspect of self-concept among even high-achieving Latino students. These students are achieving at high levels, but they do not perceive their intellectual ability or school status as particularly high, despite the observed progressive pedagogy (Rossatto, 2005), which is characterized by community-oriented problem-solving (rather than a skills-based approach to learning). Students in such programs have been shown to be more engaged in their learning processes and to use school time effectively (Rossatto, 2005), yet many programs for minority students do not yet provide a rich, forward-looking curriculum. It is a challenge to understand whether students' perceptions of their intellectual capacity relate more to cultural beliefs or school experiences.

Research has indicated that less affluent parents communicate less with school personnel, understand school expectations and students' needs less well, and monitor their children's

academic progress less often than more affluent parents (Baker & Stevenson, 1986; Vélez, 1989). At this school, however, parents were required to volunteer and attend numerous school activities, including regular parent-teacher conferences. It would be helpful to have more longitudinal data representing students over time and grade levels, especially students new to a successful school program such as this and to compare such students with a control group (with similar home environments) in order to ascertain whether changes in self-concept are functions of age, school program, and home life. Certainly, however, promoting and supporting parent involvement should be among a school's annual objectives.

Thus, even single school populations render complex efficacy issues among students. Cultural and gender issues, which are permanent, confound aspects of self-concept. The language status of students, which may be temporary in English-immersion programs, also complicates students' self-perceptions. Further analysis should explore the complexities and generate research extensions. For example, some important questions arose from this study: Can students have significant agency—making choices based on the belief that one has the capacity to succeed (Goddard & Goddard, 2001) with only moderate optimism? Do moderate levels of optimism and self-concept contribute to future academic success for minority students? How can educators support self-concept and school achievement in varied contexts?

Many Latino immigrants come to the United States to attain a better life for themselves and their offspring. There are examples of successful schools serving urban Latino students. Yet within such schools, students evidence complex patterns of behavior and achievement. Efforts to support students should target both academic and efficacy issues. Schools have the opportunity to prepare students for optimistic futures, but the process must attend to self-concept, as well as skills and strategies. Effective schools, particularly effective English-immersion schools, can provide an encouraging example of what can be accomplished and deserve to have their success analyzed and their stories told to the educational community. Even in successful schools, however, attention to self-concept is a complex endeavor that should be shared by educators and researchers so that schools can support the academic, social, and emotional growth of all students.

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